

FURTHER EDUCATION COMMISSIONER ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

City of Bristol College

SEPTEMBER 2013

Assessment

Background

1. City of Bristol College is a large College of further and higher education serving around 30,000 learners from eight main sites, and has a turnover of c£50m. The College delivers provision across all sector subject areas, offering over 1,000 courses ranging from entry to degree level. The College has three fully owned subsidiary companies and one joint venture company. The College works with a number of subcontractors. Around two-thirds of the College's income comes from public funding provided by the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency.
2. The overall 16-18 cohort in Bristol has been falling since 2008 and this trend is likely to continue until 2019/20. The College faces strong competition from other 16-18 providers, including other FE Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges and schools.
3. Following the notification by the Skills Funding Agency that City of Bristol College had been assessed as inadequate for financial health, the Minister for Skills and Enterprise decided that the new intervention process should be initiated. He asked an FE Adviser to assess the position of the College in line with the government's intervention policy set out in *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* (April 2013).
4. The FE Adviser conducted his assessment between 5 September and 28 September 2013. He assessed: the capacity and capability of the College's leadership and governance to deliver financial recovery and quality improvement at the same time; any actions that should be taken to ensure delivery of quality improvement and financial recovery (considering the range of interventions set out in *Rigour and Responsiveness*); and how and when progress should be monitored and reviewed taking into account the Agency's regular monitoring arrangements.

The Role, Composition and Activities of the Board

5. The governing body is relatively large, with 15 independent members, two staff members, two student members, the Principal and three co-opted members. The governing body has undergone significant change in the last 12 months and there are a large number of new governors. The new governing body has a range of skills and experiences, including education and training, HR, finance and accountancy, and are enthusiastic and dedicated to improving the quality of the provision and the financial health of the College. The Chair brings both continuity and freshness to the role.
6. The Clerk to the Corporation (who is also a recent appointment) is experienced and is working well with the governing body to ensure it understands the role of governors, their independence from management and how best to use their skills and experience to both support and challenge the Executive.

The Executive

7. The Executive comprises of the Principal and Chief Executive and five executive managers. The Executive has undergone significant change over the last 20 months and further change is underway. The new Executive team are skilled and experienced, work well together and have a common vision for the future of the College.
8. The College implemented a new management structure during the first half of 2013 which, amongst other things, created a new Senior Leadership Team which comprises of a group of third tier staff with management responsibility for areas of College operation. Most of the Senior Leadership Team is new to the College. The new team are well experienced and qualified.

Quality of provision

9. The College was inspected in February 2013 and was graded as inadequate for overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The College was graded as 'requires improvement' for effectiveness of leadership and management.
10. The College has developed a Post Inspection Action Plan. Progress against the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) is monitored weekly by the Executive and monthly by small working group of governors (which has recently reviewed how it reviews and challenges). Ofsted conducted a monitoring visit in October and concluded that reasonable progress has been made against five of the six areas, but insufficient progress against outcomes for learners. The College needs to focus attention on improving progress in this area. The College has secured additional support from Ofsted, focusing specifically on outcomes for learners.

Finances

11. The Skills Funding Agency has assessed the College as inadequate for financial health. The College has developed a Financial Recovery Action Plan (FRAP), led by the Deputy Principal and endorsed by the Executive and the Finance & General Purpose Committee. The FRAP seeks to reduce costs, reviews sub-contracting, and looks to increase its income by increasing contracts with Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency to place the College on a stronger footing going forward. The FRAP was validated by external auditors and the College has responded to risks and challenges raised by them.
12. The FRAP is reviewed by the Executive on a weekly basis and monitored by the Finance & General Purpose Committee which meets monthly at present. The College's risk register has been reviewed and amended to add risks relating to the College's current quality and financial issues. The risk register is monitored by the Audit Committee, which meets termly.

Conclusions

13. The College has undergone significant changes to its governing body and leadership in the last 20 months. The refreshed governing body and new leadership team is experienced and has the skills needed to deliver a college turnaround. The College is using the right people and following the right processes to secure its recovery to a

reasonable timetable. Whilst delivering financial recovery and quality improvement simultaneously is a formidable task it is achievable by the current people involved.

Recommendations from Further Education Commissioner

1. The College has the capacity and capability to deliver quality improvement and financial recovery, and the College should continue to lead its own recovery.
2. This decision is subject to the College meeting three conditions:
 - a. The College must provide regular information to the funding bodies, through the Skills Funding Agency, on the implementation and impact of the PIAP showing that the actions are delivering quality improvement.
 - b. The College must provide regular information to the Skills Funding Agency that it is on track to return to surplus in AY 2014/15 and that all additional debt or advanced funding required to support the recovery is cleared in accordance with the agreed repayment schedule.
 - c. The College secures a 'requires improvement' or better overall grade at its next inspection.

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